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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KHARTOUM 000839

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DEPARTMENT FOR AF A/S FRAZER, AF/SE NATSIOS AND AF/SPG, NSC
FOR PITTMAN AND SHORTLEY

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SUBJECT: SUDAN/UGANDA/DRC: LORD'S RESISTANCE ARMY FORCES
GATHER AT SUDAN/CONGO BORDER

REF: KHARTOUM 749

Classified By: CDA R. Powers a.i., Reason: Section 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: "Most" Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) forces east of the Nile in southern Sudan have now crossed to the west and gathered in the vicinity of Garamba National Park in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), according to the head of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA). Peace talks are due to resume in Juba May 31. End Summary.

LRA Cross the Nile

¶2. (C) "Most" LRA forces east of the Nile in southern Sudan have crossed to the west and are now in the vicinity of DRC's Garamba National Park, SPLA Chief of Staff Oyai Deng told Acting CG Juba May 26. Deng declined to estimate the number of LRA who crossed, but said the groups consisted of combatants, captives and "wives." The movement began on approximately May 17, following a May 7 ultimatum from Ugandan and South Sudanese officials demanding that the LRA relocate to the Ri-Kwangba assembly point on the Sudan-DRC border within seven days, and identifying corridors for their movement (reftel).

¶3. (C) UN sources report that "hundreds" of LRA have been seen west of the Nile, moving toward Garamba. Uganda's well-informed Consul General in Juba, Ambassador Busho Ndiyenka, said he believed only 150-200 had crossed. However, Ndiyenka said, this group represented most or all of the LRA groups that had been operating east of the Nile in southern Sudan. An ex-LRA combatant captured in January by SPLA forces, and later interviewed by ConGen staff, told us there were about six LRA groups operating east of the Nile. SPLA sources estimate the strength of each group at 10-15 fighters.

Lootings and Abductions En Route

¶4. (C) The LRA groups moving west did not follow the corridors prescribed by Sudanese and Ugandan military officials and engaged in looting and abductions en route. The LRA also rebuffed offers of food and transportation assistance. An estimated 75 LRA attacked villages north of Lainya in Central Equatoria State (about 25 miles west of Juba) on May 19, looting food and other material and abducting four people. Two of the abductees were subsequently released. One of the looted houses reportedly belonged to Government of Southern Sudan (GOSS) Minister of Information Samson Kwaje, a mediator in the peace talks. Presumed LRA elements also attacked and looted foodstuffs

from Tore, a village about 80 miles west of Juba, on May 22. According to an unconfirmed UN report, an LRA group engaged an SPLA unit at Tore on May 23 and killed two SPLA soldiers.

15. (C) Under the latest renewal of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement in the long-running Juba peace talks, GOSS and the Government of Uganda (GOU) representatives met with LRA leadership on April 13 and acceded to LRA demands to assemble all their forces at Ri-Kwangba, a short distance from the redoubt of LRA chief Joseph Kony in Garamba National Park. Subsequent efforts to arrange the LRA movement bore little fruit, however, and SPLA officials reported that they did not believe LRA forces east of the Nile were serious about assembling. SPLA forces and elements of the Uganda People's Defense Forces (UPDF) carried out a series of anti-LRA operations east of the Nile prior to the May 7 ultimatum, which SPLA officials believe contributed to the LRA's final decision to move.

Peace Talks Set to Resume

16. (C) Peace talks are set to resume in Juba May 31, and focus on issues of justice and accountability. Ugandan Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Henry Oryem Okello traveled to Juba May 24 for consultations with senior officials of the Government of Southern Sudan (GOSS) and the SPLA. SPLA chief Deng told us Okello's visit was very useful. He also said that GOSS is continuing to push for closer military and intelligence links with Uganda and DRC to contain, if not eliminate, the LRA threat.

17. (C) Ugandan CG Ndiyenka reported that LRA

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second-in-command Vincent Otti had demanded that the multi-national Cessation of Hostilities Monitoring Teams (CHMT) avoid the Ri-Kwangba assembly point. Instead, Busho said, Otti has insisted that the CHMTs base their operations in the town of Maridi, about 20 miles away. The newly beefed-up CHMTs have monitored recent LRA movements and are expected to be deployed soon east of the Nile to determine whether or not all LRA units have departed the area. UN officials also report that Otti has provided direct assurances that LRA forces will not attack UN vehicles. SPLA officials say LRA elements remaining east of the Nile will be deemed to be in violation of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement.

Comment

18. (C) The consolidation of LRA forces on the DRC/Sudan border is a significant milestone. It is too early to say whether this is a positive or negative development, however. While assembly at a single location is consistent with agreements reached in the peace process, the manner of movement and the LRA's behavior en route raise questions about the group's intentions. The LRA may be preparing to cut a final peace deal as a unified, coherent force. Or they may merely be consolidating their strength in the relative safety of the DRC while plotting the next chapter in this long conflict.

POWERS